

## CALL FOR PAPERS

# THE 2006 SYMPOSIUM OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF FOOD HISTORY

The Scientific Committee of the *European Institute of Food History* (Institut Européen d'Histoire de l'Alimentation) invites scholars to submit proposals for presenting a paper at its fifth annual symposium. The general theme retained will be “Food Excesses (and constraints) in Europe” (for details see below). The symposium is to be held in Tours, France on February 3 and 4, 2006. The scientific co-ordinators of this conference are Allen J. GRIECO (The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Firenze), Mary HYMAN (Independent Food Historian, Paris) and Peter SCHOLLIERS (Vrije Universiteit Brussels).

## *FOOD EXCESSES (AND CONSTRAINTS) IN EUROPE*

Over the centuries, limitations of food intake have been commonplace. Many and long periods of food shortages were often responsible for these instances, but they also occurred during periods of sufficient food supply when, according to rules and codes of diverse origin (religious, cultural, medical...), people have consciously restricted their food intake in order not to sin, not to appear ill-mannered, or perhaps simply not to get fat. In present-day over-fed Europe, the recurrent success of mass dieting programs, the never-ending nutritionists' efforts to find valid models for healthy eating, and the young-beautiful-slim ideal of the catwalk are manifestations of this. It would appear that a model of frugality has prevailed for many centuries in which excessive eating patterns are implicitly or explicitly condemned.

Nevertheless, on special occasions, excessive eating and drinking were and still are socially accepted, thus transgressing common habits, codes and rules. The 2006 symposium addresses particularly those moments and places when food excesses are not only permitted but encouraged. Moments of excessive collective eating and drinking were once manifold and were often (directly or indirectly) linked to corresponding constraints. Examples might be the present-day Christmas meal, the Bacchanalia in Ancient Rome, guild rites of passage in the early-modern period, the German *Fresswelle* of the 1950s, the carnival period preceding Lent or the *fêtes foraines* after harvesting. These kinds of special occasions are often directly linked to designated places where excesses are permitted, applauded and cheered (a fancy restaurant, a wedding banquet...). Outside of these physical or socially acceptable parameters, “normality” reappears at once (and excess once again is frowned upon).

Both time and place must therefore be considered when collective excessive eating and drinking come into play: excess in 1500 differs from that indulged in 1900. Moreover, notions of food excess are socially and regionally bound: what one group may consider perfectly normal behaviour, another group may see as sinfully excessive.

In order to organise the different forms, practices, perceptions and meanings of excess, the following sub-themes are suggested:

1) **Classifying excess: the establishment of norms and their authors**

How do past and present societies perceive and label food excesses? Who makes the rules and norms (church, nutritionists...)? Do they remain unquestioned? Are particular food and drink items targeted? What are the criteria for establishing restrictions?

2) **Rhythms of excess: the time and/or place**

Do approved food excesses follow a certain rhythm (yearly, seasonal, regulated by the religious calendar)? When do such moments emerge, and why? Do a society's "great excess moments" shift over time? How long might a given period of food excess last before it is condemned?

3) **Included and excluded individuals and / or groups**

Could everybody join in the feast? Were some people excluded socially, professionally or because of age, gender or origin from certain eating places or manifestations? Did those who were excluded organise alternative or secret (and perhaps contested) food-related events of their own?

4) **Food excess and social identity**

The notion of food excess differs according to social, regional or national categories. Furthermore, various categories view the excesses of other groups as outsiders, perhaps with strong disapproval. What might be the consequences of these divisions? Within a given society, are there "general" moments of excess, or are most food and drink excesses socially linked?

5) **Food excesses in every-day life**

To what extent do past or present societies accept the existence of places or times that permit repeated excess in eating and drinking habits? What are these places, who might participate? The rise of the gourmet restaurant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is an example of such a space-time; courtly banquets might be another. Can extreme attention paid to the quality of food and drink border on the excessive? And to what extent do definitions of food excess contribute to pathological relationships to food such as anorexia and bulimia?

**Some venues of inquiry:**

Carnival, Christmas, harvest feasts, holiday meals, Holy feasts, May Day festivals, New Year's eve, banquets, birthday parties, drinking parties, luxury restaurants, marriages, rites of passage, canons of civility, courtly life, dietary advice, fear of obesity, religious constraints, sumptuary laws, travellers' accounts, town festivals,...

The Symposium's working languages will be English and French

**Proposals should include a provisional title, a short abstract (ten to fifteen lines, with the presentation of the general problem and the approach), as well as one page with your c.v. and your most recent publications. These documents should be submitted before May 31<sup>st</sup>., 2005 to:**

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F - 37000 TOURS , France**

**The documents should also be e-mailed to:**

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as well as to Allen Grieco [[agrieco@itatti.it](mailto:agrieco@itatti.it)], Mary Hyman [[pmhyman@bigfoot.com](mailto:pmhyman@bigfoot.com)] and Peter Scholliers [[pscholli@vub.ac.be](mailto:pscholli@vub.ac.be)].**

**The Scientific Co-ordinators of the Symposium will make a final selection of the proposed papers and will inform all candidates of their decision in the course of June 2005.**